





“ LET YOUR CONVERSATION BE AS IT BECOMETH THE  
GOSPEL OF CHRIST.”

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# A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

VISITATION

OF

THE VEN. THE ARCHDEACON OF BUCKS.

IN THE

PARISH CHURCH AT AYLESBURY,

JUNE 7, 1843.

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BY THE REV.

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RECTOR OF DUNTON.

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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE ASSEMBLED CLERGY.

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TO THE VEN. THE  
ARCHDEACON OF BUCKS,  
AND  
THE CLERGY

ASSEMBLED AT HIS VISITATION AT AYLESBURY,

*This Sermon,*

PUBLISHED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THEIR REQUEST,

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY

THEIR FAITHFUL BROTHER AND SERVANT,

EDWARD Q. ASHBY.

DUNTON RECTORY,  
July 20, 1843.



A  
S E R M O N,

&c.

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I TIMOTHY vi. 11, 12.

“But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness ; fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.”

THESE are the brief, yet animated, and eloquent terms, in which St. Paul sets before us the character “of the man of God,” the Christian minister, in its highest perfection, and excellency. We may search the Scriptures diligently, though ineffectually, in attempting to find any single series of precepts, in which the great duties of our mission, to “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” are more clearly, yet comprehensively embodied, than in these few sentences. They naturally take almost the very first place, among those general directions

of "warning, consolation, correction, and instruction in righteousness," which St. Paul, "moved by the Holy Ghost," addressed to Timothy, "his own son in the faith." We shall look, perhaps, in vain elsewhere, for words which breathe a purer, a more chastened, yet elevated spirit of religious zeal, or which evidence a more devoted reliance on the truth as it is in Jesus. They appeal to the highest and holiest motives, which can affect the heart of man; and certainly, it did in those days require motives, exhortations, hopes, and promises, whose truth, force, and credibility, were directly derived from the eternal Fountain of truth, the Author of all goodness, the Lord of all power and might himself; to "lift up the hands which hung down, and to stay the feeble knees" of those, who were made as the "filth of the earth, and as the offscouring of all things." For to what description of destiny, was the man of God then constrained, for the love of Jesus Christ, and for the sake of his truth? Not only were its fruits, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," opposed by every weapon, which the devices of an evil heart of unbelief, and the corruptions of an age unparalleled in licentiousness and cruelty, could employ; not only had the scourge, the stake, the cross, its willing and triumphant victims, but the first confessors of the faith had to achieve a martyrdom, worse even to some minds than death itself. The ridicule of the scorner, the laugh of the world, the subtle artificial sophistry of the professed and venal



philosophical disputant,—contempt, wonder, pity,—all that could wound the feelings and break the spirit, were endured; nay, rather fearlessly and victoriously battled through, by that phalanx of devoted warriors in the good fight of faith, whose reward, “eternal life,” they have ages since laid hold on.

My brethren; the merciful providence of God has far removed us, both in fate and time, from any possible personal knowledge of those awful extremes of active suffering and active virtue, so resignedly, so dauntlessly, braved, by that cloud of witnesses, that noble army, those chosen saints of God, whose names are written in heaven. Yet we who would fain follow their footsteps, have professed, as they professed, before many witnesses, that same good confession, which gave them victory over death and the grave. We also have bound ourselves to fight that same good fight of faith, whose prize is life eternal; we also are called upon “to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness;” and although, in the exercise of that good profession, we are not required to “forsake homes, nor brethren, nor father, nor mother, nor wife, nor children, nor land, for Christ’s name’s sake,”—although we are not required to fight with wild beasts in the arena, nor with men even more ferocious, yet let no one suppose, even in these days of comparative peace, that “to sanctify the lives of ourselves and our hearers, to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ,” is, or ever can be, an office of ease, soft-

ness, and enjoyment. "To take heed to ourselves, and to our doctrine, to continue in them, to save ourselves, and those that hear us," constitute an encounter between the flesh and the spirit, whose complete and saving success, no one can reckon upon on this side the grave. The trust we have committed to us is the most awfully responsible which can be given to man:—to man, corrupt, fallible, vain; whose best virtues have a natural tendency to deviate into their opposite weaknesses; in whom strength may show itself only by presumptuous rashness, and thus precipitate his fall; in whom humility may become timid, diffident, idleness; and zeal, without which nothing good, nothing great, nothing holy, was ever attempted or achieved, zeal itself even, may "not be according to knowledge." It is evidently impossible, my brethren, but that there should be many general, as well as many particular and individual impediments and hindrances to the fullest spiritual usefulness; yet to those which arise only from the inherited fault and corruption of our common father Adam; against those fears which may assault the bravest, those follies which may delude the wisest heart, our blessed Lord's perpetual promise is our most sure safeguard. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." And while recogniz-

ing with feelings of the most heartfelt and devoted gratitude, the renewing and sanctifying influences of that divine Comforter; yet also well knowing, that the grace of God acts not to supersede, but to direct and assist our own earnest endeavours, let those other warning words of our Lord be bound as a "sign upon our hands, let them be as frontlets between our eyes:" "Take ye heed, and watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is; and what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." To God's gracious assistance and protection then, we may with thankful humility confidently commit the weakness of our own strength. There are, however, many lets, hindrances, and discouragements, in a great degree independent of natural character, and by which the Christian minister is encompassed, and thwarted, in his endeavour that "the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified." Some of these oppositions have especial reference to those differences of opinion, and divisions of feeling, political as well as religious, which are peculiar to the times in which our lot is cast,—while there are others common to all time. The first named class of "doubtful disputations" involves points of the deepest and most serious interest, while it also implies many minor matters of speculative enquiry; certainly not generally necessary to salvation; indeed, almost as little so even to the profession of Christianity; but into any detailed examination concerning these various causes of hindrance, doubt, controversial and ministerial disunion,

this is assuredly neither the time nor the place to enter; and the more especially, since I am certain, that no minister of Christ's Gospel here present, will hesitate to confess, that "forgetting those things which are behind," and reaching forth unto those things which are before, in pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, his fullest exertion, the most thorough devotion of his every faculty, will be all too little, really to "show himself approved by God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." There is no one here present, who will not feelingly allow, that the years of his whole existence, were their sum patriarchal, would be found all too few to reason—convincingly, effectually, and savingly to reason—of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."

Now it is needless to assert, that the very alpha and omega of all religious teaching, the first and great principle of the mystery of godliness, proceeds upon our most unhesitating and immediate admission, that sin is the melancholy birthright of man—upon our true and penitent confession of the manifold wickednesses we have ourselves, from time to time, committed against the divine majesty of God; and upon our heartfelt conviction that "the condition of man is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God." Reason, conscience, and Scripture, have "concluded all under sin, that

the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." But do we find this great axiom, the very groundwork and foundation of the narrow way over which alone we can pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death, practically and without question received by the natural heart of man? *Assuredly not.*

There are many in every congregation most unwilling to become as it were little children; most reluctant to confess that they are ignorant, weak, and sinful; that they are not sufficient to do anything of themselves, but that their *whole* sufficiency is of God.

We are all of us naturally disposed to self-reliance in spiritual things; and even assuming that this general confession of generally admitted natural depravity be passively acknowledged—it is an acknowledgment with which (as passive) the heart has often little or nothing to do. "Tush," one class of sinners will say, "God hath forgotten, he hideth his face, and he will never see it;" while other self-deluding guilty sophists will interpret half-doubting, half-believing hopes, by their own presumptuous wishes, they will *pervert* the meaning while they adopt the words: "O Israel, trust in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." To fix the attention of careless vice upon serious things, to transform the heart of stone to the heart of flesh, to rouse into a flame the scarcely kindled, or the half extinguished sparks of virtuous and

holy resolution ; to re-create the whole moral man ; to purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God ; to destroy the influence of this world over the minds of those, who seem, if even they fully know of, to care not for any other ; to teach men who live from day to day only, to walk by faith and not by sight ; to open blind eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God : these are high, holy, and awful functions, towards whose proper performance, doubts of our own sufficiency might well darken into absolute despair, were it not vouchsafed us to exclaim with St. Paul, "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we faint not."

Enough has been already said to prove, that if we are to have any success in bringing men to righteousness, if we are to inherit any share in that blessed promise given by the prophet, if we are to "shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever," then must our lives be a *practical illustration* of "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." The righteousness we may well insist upon for ourselves (if we could but realize it) extends to the full meaning of the English word righteousness, of which the Greek *δικαιοσύνη* falls very far short. The righteousness we have bound ourselves to follow after, is the firm and diligent practice of the moral virtues prescribed by the Gospel, and presented to us by the example of our blessed Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ. But is this a hard saying? Indeed, no. For this we are to do according only to the best of our fallible ability, God being our helper. But nothing short of the very best exertions of that fallible ability will avail aught in that almighty Helper's sight; for recollect, my brethren, we are the salt of the earth. "If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is, thenceforth, good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." We are called upon to exert the whole strength of our minds in the government of our passions, in the subjection of the animal to the spiritual part of our nature, being assured that if *we* fall we fall not alone; we give unto others an occasion, an example, even a seeming justification for falling; we give grounds for the enemies of our faith to blaspheme that faith, for there will never be wanting men to whom our moral deficiencies will be matter for triumphant spite, and who will delight to stab our holy religion through the sides of her professed defenders.

Again, our righteousness and our fulfilment of the precepts of the moral law, must have for its basis, godliness. Love to God, must be the principle of love to our neighbour. With that system which founds morality upon *utility* (upon utility confined only to the purposes of this present life) we can have as little fellowship as light with darkness, as Christ with Belial. We are to be honest and virtuous, sober and temperate, not only because our character,

our fortune, our health would suffer from a different course of action, but especially because we know and feel, that "the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto us, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we are to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world : " we are to be kind, meek, compassionate, forgiving, not only because such virtues tend to our own personal ease and tranquillity, or because they may be the fruits of a naturally amiable and benevolent disposition, but particularly because we are enjoined to be "kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us."

Again, our teaching, to be well-pleasing to God and useful to man, should be prosecuted in the spirit of mildness, conciliation, and forbearance. We are, it is true, to "compel men to come in," but that is as little to be done now, as it was in old time, by commanding fire to come down from heaven, but by the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Our intercourse with all around us should be, as far as lieth in us, a perpetual and lively commentary upon that most sublime text, "God is love." Do we seek for a perfect example of gentleness and magnanimity? Behold St. Paul, a man possessed of the most dauntless courage, unappalled by unparalleled varieties and extremities of danger, and who yet "made himself all things to all men, that he might by all means save



some ;” “ whose heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel was, that they might be saved.” Patience under opposition, and meekness under provocation, must assuredly be ours also, if we indulge any hope to establish our claim in the sight of God, to be fellow-helpers to his truth:—since these are virtues, by the due exercise of which alone, can any of the before-mentioned Christian graces be made effectual to the purpose of the man of God, “ even the salvation of souls.” It may be, that the consciences of many here return to them an approving, an almost justifying testimony, as to their possession of not a few of these Christian virtues. To God, then, be the sole glory ; for they lack that one thing needful, which will give life and grace to all the rest, if they lack humility. If St. Paul “ the chosen vessel ” of Christ, if he who “ was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful ” (or, as it is more truly translated, *possible*) “ for a man to utter,” if he disclaimed all idea of absolute attainment, all hope, all thought, of assured perfection ; if an inspired Apostle of God can say, “ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ; ” shall we, most truly ignorant of what some men seem to be the most assured, their own present and eternal acceptance with God, shall we pretend to, or boast of, any grace, however imparted, however derived ? Shall we openly or covertly assume any merit, before the “ King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God, who putteth no trust in

his saints, in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, who chargeth his angels themselves with folly?" May God forbid the existence of such daring ignorance; may God enlighten such moral darkness, if any such exist; may God pardon such spiritual presumption, if any such there be. The only sure and safe resting place for your souls, my brethren, is in this self-humiliating conviction, that though we might with apparent truth say, "Lord, we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have done many wonderful works," yet this is but the vainest and most perilous boasting, if we cannot say also, with fear and trembling, "By the grace of God I am what I am." And if "his grace, which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; if I have laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not *I*, but the grace of God which was with me." On that good Spirit, who will sanctify us wholly both in soul and body, we are to cast our care: to Him we are to make our unceasing prayer, for the wisdom which is to direct, for the strength which is to sustain us; who alone is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of God.

It is, indeed, true, that all Christian men are equally concerned with ourselves, in full, undenyng obedience to these precepts, for all men are called upon to "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness:" but it is *our* especial and particular duty, business, and privilege, to fight the

good fight of faith ; to explain, uphold, and defend the true teaching and meaning of Christ : and it must never be lost sight of by us, that the explanation of those mysteries, the support of that teaching, our every weapon of defence and attack, must be drawn from that vast spiritual arsenal, the written word of God, the Scriptures of eternal truth. Doubtless “every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man which is an householder, which bringeth out of his treasure things old and new ;” doubtless, the discoveries of modern science, the actual results of historical or geographical research, as well as the really proved facts of ecclesiastical antiquity, may be well and fitly brought forward to bear witness to the truth, to illustrate the wisdom, and power, and mercy of God : but all these “things old and new,” however valuable, are, and of necessity must be incidental and subsidiary to the one heavenly treasure—the truth itself, and can claim no substantial authority of their own, unless they harmonize with, and are confirmed by, the *very* word of life. It matters not, what be the quality, the intellect, the acquirement of our audiences, those instructions will ever be the most certainly, ultimately, and permanently efficacious, which are drawn direct from the pure well of undefiled truth, as little as possible polluted by human distinctions, human subtleties, and human refinements.

Finally, my brethren, “the time is short ;” it remaineth that “both they that have wives be as

though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away." A most awful moment is surely approaching. We know not how soon it may be at hand to any one of us, when our eyes, closing upon this world, its vanities, its joys, its duties, its cares, will open upon eternity. At that hour, when the hopes and fears, the troubles and agitations of human life are at an end for ever, what can speak consolation to our troubled souls? what can bid our spirits depart in peace? what, but this conviction; that we have been, according to the very best of that ability, whose greatest strength is weakness in the sight of God, "messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; that we have taught, premonished, and provided for the Lord's family; that we have sought for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children that are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever."

May the Almighty, of his all-abundant mercy, grant that ours may then be, the consoling, the humble, and yet the justifying answer of a good conscience towards Him; the answer of those whose faith hath thus made them the children of God. That at the inevitable hour of eternal change, appointed unto all men, however sudden perhaps in time, however agonising perhaps in circumstance, its most awful

advent be; we may still be found with our “loins girded about,” and “our lights burning.” That God may then permit us to proclaim our “sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” in the words of that most learned, most humble, most moderate, most holy man, the venerable Hooker :—“The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us, the countenance of the heaven may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, the stars their glory: but concerning the man that trusteth in God, if the fire have proclaimed itself unable so much as to singe a hair of his head; if lions, beasts ravenous by nature and keen by hunger, being set down to devour, have, as it were, religiously adored the very flesh of the faithful man; what is there in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God to him? If I be of this note, who shall make a separation between me and my God? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: I am persuaded that neither tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall ever prevail so far over me. I know in whom I have believed; I am not ignorant whose precious blood hath been shed for me; I have

a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power, unto Him I commit myself: his own finger hath engraven this sentence in the tables of my heart, ‘Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not; therefore the assurance of my hope will I labour to keep as a jewel unto the end, and by labour through the gracious mediation of his prayer I shall keep it.’ ”

THE END.



